

March 27, 2012

Parity For All-

My name is Mary Beth Seefelt and I am here today to speak with each of you about the importance of Mental Health Parity. As a parent and a concerned citizen I wonder how many of you have had mental illness touch your life in some way? Perhaps you have had a friend or relative who has struggled with depression, or your child has been a classmate of a another child who has emotional or behavioral challenges, like ADD or ADHD, that have affected their ability to learn or even make friends in school. On your way into work this morning, perhaps you passed a homeless man or woman on the street that was muttering to themselves or yelling at a fire hydrant. Mental Illness touches ALL of our lives in one way or another. Right now at this very moment, approximately one in five children in Michigan will need mental health services and/or special education services for an emotional, behavioral, or mental health disorder before they reach the age of 18. And because they happen to live in this state, which is one of only seven in our whole nation that has yet to grant mental health parity, there is a great likelihood that they will never receive those services.

I am the parent of a wonderful, intelligent young man who has Bipolar Disorder, which is a neurobiological chronic illness. He has the same diagnosis as his father, his aunt, and four of his cousins. Zack has a chemical imbalance in his brain which affects his mood, which in turn affects his ability to learn, to build friendships with his peers, to make responsible choices, and his quality of life at times. He and I were her in Lansing last year to tour the State Capital with his schoolmates and we were able to meet our senator and talk about how government works and how you folks are elected to the seats you are sitting in right now. He was so excited learn how a bill becomes a law and that each citizen of our state and country has a voice and the privilege to use that voice by voting for folks like you to think and act and vote for your constituents collective voice. How am I to explain to my son that his cousin Michael, who is autistic, somehow has more value than him? ALL of our children deserve to be cared for and valued. Insurance companies should not have the luxury to pick and choose who they want to help. This is not a good business question but a moral one. I think it is wonderful that all of my friends with autistic children are finally getting the help and recognition that they deserve...but don't my child and my family deserve the same? Are you listening? Can you hear us? Remember that you vote and work for the good of all of us, not just a select few.

Last week, my husband and I were lucky enough to meet with Representative Gail Haines in person at our local Starbucks. We had a good conversation and she was very honest and intelligent in her thoughts and opinions. She agreed that we need parity. But it saddened me that she does not feel she can vote to support Mental Health Parity because of a lone voice in the Senate. This is NOT good government when our elected officials feel like they cannot vote the way they really want or should because of another's inability to truly vote for his or her own constituents, but rather votes for his or her own personal agenda.

I am asking you now to vote to SUPPORT Mental Health Parity in addition to supporting coverage for children with Autism by including a Mental Health Parity bill with SB 414, 415, and 981. Michigan families deserve Parity for all- not just some. Thank you!

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